



## SYMMETRY'S NEWSLETTER FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

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# THE BALANCE SHEET

*Most people accept work pressures as a common element of their jobs, but too much pressure can lead to poor performance, declining confidence and burnout. Learning about stress management may help you, your employees, and the company.*

### Stress Management

While stress affects everyone differently, there are several types of workplace situations that are commonly identified as stress producing:

- when organizational change is at a high level and the environment is unsettled
- when the goals are high
- in high profile or high stakes situations
- in helping professions dealing with difficult populations
- in work that leads to low rates of success

By practicing effective stress management and keeping a balanced lifestyle, you are setting a good example for your work group.

A key first step is to identify the source of the stress. Not all stress is the same and different strategies are required to alleviate the impact these stressors have on your life. The three main areas of stress are Project Stress, People Stress and Personal Stress.

### Project Stress

If the main source of stress comes from workplace activities:

- Review expectations – are there clear communication about responsibilities and well-defined priorities for yourself and your employees?
- Review skills – is training or mentoring needed to improve ability and efficiency?
- Review time lines – has the scope of the project changed and are the time lines still appropriate? A stressful project with a clear deadline is more manageable than a chronic situation. If the situation becomes chronic, it is important to ensure that departmental and organizational goals are being achieved. If they're not, re-evaluate the project.

### People Stress

If the main source of stress results from interpersonal conflicts, staff management issues, or poor productivity of the workgroup:

- Establish effective communication processes within your work group, through formal and informal methods, to ensure that you and your employees have a clear understanding of workplace issues.
- Evaluate team functioning and listen to concerns. Ask yourself if there is any way to make your workplace more enjoyable during a difficult time of prolonged stress. Personal issues such as divorce, the death of a loved one, illness, or war may cause extreme stress among your staff. It is okay to make temporary adjustments, but expect some improvement in six to eight weeks. You can end up doing people more harm than good if you let them make the temporary adjustments permanent.
- Share information. During stressful times, make sure people understand any changes that are taking place. "Big picture" knowledge may help them see where the changes fit in.

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- Promote effective time management. Help employees get organized, prioritize goals and tasks, and keep a daily to-do list.
- Reach out for assistance. If the situation has become chronic, outside intervention through Human Resources or Symmetry may be helpful in creating options to address the issues.

## Personal Stress

Personal stress is not simply left at home any more than work stress can be left at the office. If personal problems are at the core of the stress, key considerations are:

- As with other causes of stress, determine whether it is the result of a time-limited situation such as moving, adjusting to a new job, or a minor disagreement with a loved one; or if it has become chronic and is impacting health, sleep, relationships or other daily activities.
- Clarify expectations. There are phases throughout life when everyone must clarify personal expectations. Our lives change and sometimes we need to make adjustments, ask for help, or modify priorities.
- Seek support. Symmetry is an excellent resource to help you address concerns and develop personal stress management strategies.

## Relationship between body and mind

Have you ever heard someone described as a “pain in the neck,” or perhaps use phrases like “I just can’t stomach that” or, “it makes me sick to think about it?” These common statements describe the connection between our state of mind and our body. Stress can create very real physical responses including:

- headaches
- muscle/skeletal pain such as back pain
- autoimmune problems
- gastric/abdominal distress

These reactions may be complicated by various psychological stress reactions. Examples of these are:

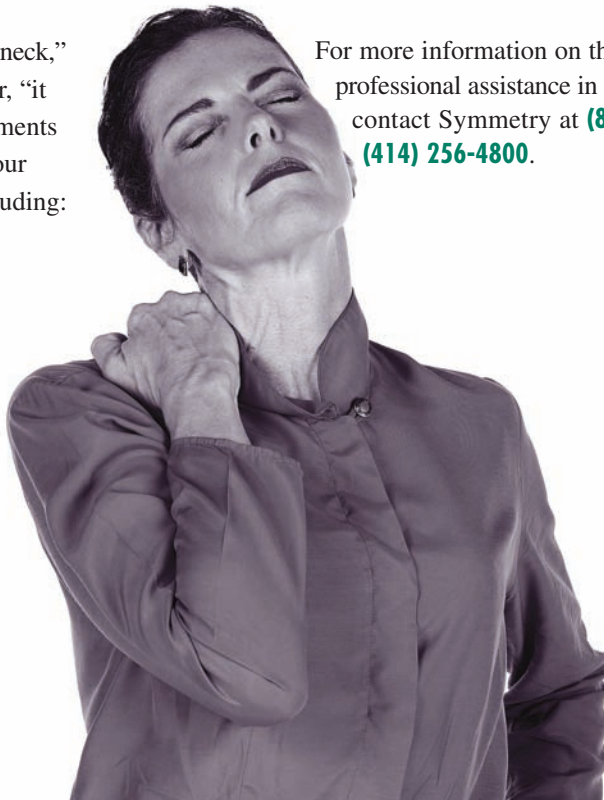
- slowed thinking
- preoccupation

- difficulty making decisions or in problem solving
- irritability with others
- worrying about others
- decreased attention span
- anxiety
- irrational anger
- grief or sadness
- self-medication: overeating, consuming alcohol, smoking
- burnout, which is typically characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion; detachment from subordinates, family, friends; and a loss of satisfaction or sense of accomplishment

Because some physical and psychological stress responses can be severe, particularly during periods of high stress, it is best to focus on managing the symptoms before you attempt to eliminate them. Effective stress management strategies include:

- Exercise vigorously and alternate with periods of relaxation.
- Structure your time and try to maintain normal routines.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and to let others know you feel that way.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals.
- Don't numb yourself with alcohol or drugs.
- Reach out to others; people do care.

For more information on this topic or to obtain professional assistance in developing strategies, contact Symmetry at **(800) 236-7905** or **(414) 256-4800**.



**SYMMETRY**

BALANCED WORKPLACE SERVICES